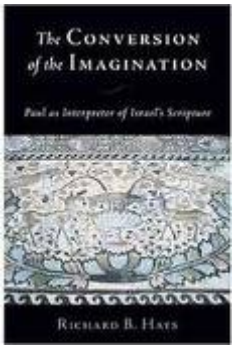
Metalepsis, Revitalizing the Theological Health of the Church



I'm reading Richard Hays new book, "the Conversion of the Imagination:Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture". He proposes that if we follow Paul's example in the interpretation of Israel's Scripture, biblical history will be re-assimilated into theological hermeneutics giving us a new, more genuine biblical context, historical continuity and clarity. Hays says if we follow Paul's example of interpretation, the church's imagination will be converted to see Scripture in a radically new way.

In the past ten years or so, with Hays, N.T. Wright, Scot McKnight and a host of others there's been a resurgence of interest and appreciation for Paul as a reader of Scripture. The demise of modernist historicism as a dominant hermeneutical paradigm and the emergence of "intertextuality" as a vital perspective in biblical studies are revitalizing the theological health of the church. Prior to this Hays says, "the usual options were some version of liberal demythologizing on one hand and conservative literalism on the other. Each was simply a different version of an epistemologically cramped modernism". Dude! Hays proposed that what Paul did was narrate his pagan converts into Israel's story through metaphorical appropriation of Old Testament Scripture, teaching them to think apocalyptically. He said it was when he became acquainted with Paul's intertextual hermeneutic practice or "metalepsis" that he began wondering how much biblical context had been overlooked or insufficiently appreciated by modern interpreters. "Metalepsis", at least in regards to Scripture reading, is where one text alludes to an earlier text in a way that provides greater clarity and context to the text originally cited. It changes everything.

Used here, “metalepsis” means that when an Old Testament citation is made by a New Testament author like Paul, the context of the Old Testament Scripture is transposed onto the New Testament meaning. This allows for a more expansive understanding and often begins to bring a new perspective, while at the same time exposing the error of the old. Metalepsis enables the reader to uncover the unstated, suppressed correspondences between the two texts. And it’s interesting, Hays informs us that once the Scriptures are grasped in light of this hermeneutical key, their pervasively eschatological character comes into focus. We will take a look at Paul seeking to teach his readers in I Corinthians to read Scripture metaleptically, recovering their eschatalogical context, mindful of God’s judgment when we continue with this review of Hay’s book.

Hays believes that with metalepsis, there is a theological engagement with prior texts and with history that, potentially, unleashes new theological creativity, new perspectives and understanding because of the absence of traditional, dogmatic restraints.

Sent from my iPad

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